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To: Members of the Senate and House Transportation Committees
From: Jim Moore, Executive Director, Northern Michigan Alliance for Independent Living
Date: April 14, 2005
RE: Joint Transportation Committee Hearing – Cadillac, Michigan

I want to thank the Senate and House Transportation Committees for bringing to Northwest Lower Michigan this hearing on MDOT's transportation plan. As you may know, this is one of the state's fastest growing regions which also has one of the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the state. This being a primarily rural region, transportation is essential to livelihood of many people who live here. Lack of public transportation is one of the most serious problems reported by persons with disabilities and seniors who live in rural areas. For many transit-dependent groups, such as persons with disabilities, senior citizens, low-income individuals and youth, public transportation is a lifeline to employment opportunities, self-sufficiency, and full participation in community life.

One of the fastest growing segments of the population in the region are senior citizens. Of this population, nearly 40% of the region's seniors have some form of disability. Additionally, nearly one out of every five residents has a disability. Consequently the need to support and maintain publicly subsidized, low-cost, accessible transportation for the area residents is critical.

Bus systems also play an important part in driving local economics. People don't just ride buses; they ride buses to work, to access health care, shopping, recreation, and other productive activities. Public transportation is an investment in our state and in our communities. It is also an investment that pays off. According to the American Public Transportation Association, every 1\$ that is invested in public transportation has a return of \$6 in local economic activity. As the state's budget decreases it is important to recognize the important contribution that a public transit system makes to the vitality of a community by creating job opportunities and economic growth as well as to the improvement to the quality of life for individuals that utilize this service. While tough budget decisions are being made in Lansing, we urge you to encourage your colleagues to fully fund and maintain low cost transportation solutions such as our public bus systems. We urge you to fight to protect dwindling state funds that ultimately curtail services and hurt people as funding cutbacks occur. We also ask that you explore funding innovative transportation programs such as voucher programs or other alternate ride programs that enhance the ability for people access transportation services.

Public transportation offers people mobility. In rural communities, public transportation gives people the opportunity to do things that improve their lives. Distances in Northern Michigan are sometimes great between where a person lives and where they need to go. Lack of access to affordable transit services can lead to social isolation and other life complications. The Northern Michigan Alliance for Independent Living urges you to support the increase in rural transportation services and assist the existing rural services to meet the transportation needs in their areas. We also urge you to support the regionalization of transit services so that persons can travel between counties that already share in the economic growth and development in the region.